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Initiated Measure No. 1: The Dove Bill

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Initiated Measure No. 1

The Dove Bill



**COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE
SOUTH DAKOTA STATE UNIVERSITY
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE**

Initiated Measure No. 1

The Dove Bill

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During the 1979 session the South Dakota legislature passed Senate Bill 49 which added the mourning dove to the list of game birds. Petitions were filed with the Secretary of State with sufficient signatures to refer the law to a vote of the people in the 1980 general election.

This is the second time the voters have been asked to vote on this question. The 1967 legislature placed the mourning dove on the game bird list and it remained there until 1972 when initiated petitions were filed referring the law to popular vote. In November of 1972, the voters repealed the law.

During the period from 1972 to 1979, three neighboring states (Nebraska, North Dakota, and Wyoming) added the mourning dove to their list of game birds. Because the mourning dove is a migratory species and all the states south of South Dakota permit mourning dove hunting, some South Dakota hunters requested the legislature to again permit hunting in the state.

The Species

The mourning dove ranges throughout the 48 contiguous states, the southern portions of Canada, and Mexico.* It is the most abundant game bird in North America. Northern reared birds migrate in the fall to the southern states, Mexico, and Central America, returning again in the spring.

Mourning doves have high rates of both mortality and reproduction. A pair normally will produce several broods per year consisting of almost always two per brood. In the longer southern growing season, some active nests may occur the year around, although most nesting is between April and late August. In South Dakota, two to four broods are typical.

The dove's high reproduction rate is made possible by its short incubation period of 14 days. (Most game birds require 21-28 days.) After hatching, the young birds are able to fend for themselves in about 2 weeks.

The entire cycle of nest building, egg laying, incubation, and rearing of the young requires about a month.

The natural mortality rate is about 60%, due to such factors as weather, parasites, disease, and predation. Doves depend heavily upon water, seeking it several times a day. During drought periods, their mortality rate can be unusually high.

They are primarily seed eaters. Preferred feeding sites include roadsides, stubble fields, and uncropped areas where preferred weed seeds are common.

Effects of Hunting

The mourning dove is the most widely hunted game bird in America; 33 states have seasons. There are more mourning doves bagged annually than all other game birds combined.

In states where dove hunting is permitted, the birds bagged account for about 10% of the doves reared. According to research conducted by state and

federal wildlife biologists, present rates of hunter harvest have little effect on total mourning dove populations. Variations in populations are influenced to a much greater degree by environmental factors affecting natural mortality and nesting success.

Hunting of migratory species, including the mourning dove, is regulated by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service. Each year the Service establishes the length of season and bag limits for every migratory species. State regulations may be more restrictive than the federal regulations but not more liberal.

Income from Hunting

In 1972, the last year dove hunting was allowed in the state, resident dove hunters were in the field an estimated 59,000 hunter days. In that year, the U.S. Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife estimated total out-of-pocket expenditures of small game hunters to be \$7.62 per trip. Inflating this figure to present price levels would suggest South Dakota hunters spend about \$750,000 annually on the sport. (This might be a conservative figure considering the dramatic increase in the price of petroleum since 1972.)

This amount cannot be considered as income added to the state's economy because some unknown proportion of that figure will be spent on other recreational activities in the state in the absence of dove hunting. It is, however, an indicator of the value South Dakota sportsmen place upon dove hunting.

Money spent by non-resident

*Source: Migratory shore and upland game birds in North America, The International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, Washington, D.C. 1978
Mourning dove breeding population status, administrative report, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Office of Migratory Bird Management, Laurel, Maryland.

hunters might be considered as additions to the state's economy. There can be no accurate estimate of how much this would be because, since 1972, dove hunting was legalized in North Dakota, Nebraska, and Wyoming. These three states would compete for the non-resident hunter dollar too. We can expect some non-resident hunters, but the number would be pure conjecture.

Objections to Dove Hunting

One objection often heard to the hunting of doves is that many people consider the dove a songbird. On a calm morning, the mating or nesting call of the male mourning dove may be heard almost anyplace in South Dakota because of the species' ability to adapt to almost any environment.

The mourning dove has a habit of perching on telephone and electric transmission wires. As a result, there has been damage to the lines by vandals shooting at the perching bird, a practice

hunters consider unsportsmanlike.

The mourning dove is considered by many to be beneficial to farmers because of its seed eating habits. Crop examinations reveal that the dove does consume large amounts of weed seeds, but, considering the amount produced each year, the total amount consumed is relatively small. The dove consumes what is available in season. During and after harvest until migration its diet consists largely of grains dropped during harvest.

The beneficial properties of the bird may be overestimated. However, unlike many birds indigenous to South Dakota, its detrimental characteristics are few.

There are some who fear that if mourning dove hunting is allowed, the mourning dove will go the way of its cousin, the passenger pigeon, and become extinct.

The probability of this happening is extremely remote. Decades of hunting in other states have shown the dove to be

well adapted to hunting pressure. Its roosting, nesting, and elusive habits are very different from the habits of the passenger pigeon. Game biologists constantly monitor populations of game species and seasons, and bag limits are regulated in such a manner that only the harvestable surplus may be hunted.

The Ballot Question

This measure will be identified on the ballot as Initiated Measure No. 1. The question posed will be "Should Senate Bill No. 49 become law?" A vote "yes" is for passage allowing hunting; a "no" is for rejection of the bill.

Photo courtesy Ron Spomer, Game, Fish, & Parks Commission

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